

## Mystery Musician

*Searching for great incentive to reward positive behavior for our music students can be an endless job. Let's face it - Music is not a quiet lesson to teach! Music Lessons are an "active" participation lesson each child armed with an instrument and as a result the kids get excited, busy and loud!*

*This incentive system would suit any classroom or studio music teacher with loud and excited children of any age. It could easily become a classroom management structure to be used day in, day out throughout many classes. Best of all -it's FUN!*

Most of my music students are between 5 and 10 years of age, and they LOVE a little incentive system I've devised. I teach in a public school, and my class sizes are large. Last year I had some sections of over 40 students! Even with large groups of students, my idea called "Mystery Musician" is extremely effective. I've stuck with it because unlike a lot of other incentive/behavior ideas, this one focuses on both group behavior (and thus their cooperation and teamwork skills because they're working towards a common goal!) and the behavior of the individual with a chance for a little reward. Here's how Mystery Musician works:

Prior to my students entering the room, I've randomly selected one student's name from the class. This will be the Mystery Musician for that class. It's a mystery because my students won't find out who it is until the very end of the class time.

When my students enter the room, the word "MUSIC" is written on the board. (Over time I made laminated magnetic letters that stick to my board - these are just more durable and stand out a little more than the hand-written letters.) The idea is that if my students collectively get too noisy, off task, etc. that they lose a letter. I always start by removing the letter C and work backwards. Sometimes I will announce that we've lost a letter, but most of the time I can continue with our activity without even having to stop to explain what has happened. The visual aspect of taking something away seems to have an impact all by itself. I love that it doesn't interrupt my teaching to take away a letter. It's a great non-verbal reminder to them to exercise good behavior and self-control. We continue in this manner, and the students know that in order to have their Mystery Musician for they day, they must have at least the letter M left when it is time to leave the music room. The U-C in music are just "reminder" letters with no consequence of their own.

Right before my student's line up to leave, I will announce who the Mystery Musician was for that day. Provided that student has followed directions with no problems for the day, he or she gets to select a little "prize" from the Mystery Musician basket. This is just a little container I keep on the piano (in plain view of the whole class) that is filled with little trinkets like music theme pencils and erasers, small sticker sheets, etc. Dollar stores and Oriental Trading ([www.orientaltrading.com](http://www.orientaltrading.com)) are perfect sources for Mystery Musicians prizes.

If the class loses all of the letters in music, there is no Mystery Musician for the day. In fact, I won't even tell them whose name was picked. I do this for two reasons.

1. It's possible that the Mystery Musician for that day behaved beautifully, and the class was just having a bad day. I don't want that "good" student to feel like he or she was punished by not getting to pick the prize.
2. Half of the fun is wondering if it's your own day to be the Mystery Musician. If the class hasn't earned finding out who the mystery musician is, then I won't tell them.

A few other thoughts on the “Mystery Musician” Management Strategy:

- There is no limit to the number of times a student can be the Mystery Musician. My reason is this:  
I don't want the incentive to be gone for those students who were already the Mystery Musician. Unfortunately some kids wouldn't care about Mystery Musician if they knew they had had their turn, and wouldn't be picked again any time soon. So while it would be extremely rare for the same student to be selected two music class times in a row, this would never be impossible. It keeps the incentive alive for them!
- Some classes ask me if they can earn letters back once they've lost them. My answer is always yes. If a class can correct their issues and get back on track, I love to put letters back on the board!
- You can adapt it any way you like. Some times when a class is particularly rowdy coming in the room, I'll make them a deal like, "Today we can have two Mystery Musicians if we keep ALL of the letters in music." This is great for the class that comes to music right after recess, before Winter Break, etc. Often on the last day of school, as an added treat, I'll give them a Mystery Musician for EVERY single letter in music that remains. Kids love the thought that they have 5 chances to be the Mystery Musician!

I know my students like this strategy because:

- 1) It's effective for me in terms of classroom management.
- 2) Every year on the first day of the new school year, one of the first questions to come out of their mouth is: "Are we going to do Mystery Musician this year? "

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*I love this idea because it exemplifies the fact that "actions speak louder than words". Very often the best classroom strategies don't require copious amounts of rules and regulations and no talking to make a point by a teacher. I can see this idea working in so many classrooms around the world because it doesn't require a certain personality by the teacher and doesn't require our students to have in depth knowledge of the game rules. It's such an easy, but effective strategy to implement all year round.*

*For our visually based learners, the bold MUSIC letters give a perfect indication and reminder of where they are and how they can win the game. The auditory component of the teacher not having to raise his or her voice, just lets them get on with the most important job of inspiring the students without any behavior distractions. And the teamwork element that this idea creates in requiring our students to work together to achieve a common goal and earning incentive makes everyone feel good and appeals to the kinesthetic side of all of our personalities.*

*Mystery Musician would appeal to any class out there of any ability. It's the simple things that are often the best!*